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Notes and Opinions.

The Power to Forgive Sin, John 20:22, 23.—This passage, and the presumably parallel ones in Matt. 16:19; 18:18, have not yet received an interpretation which sets at rest the matter presented by them. The Roman Catholic interpretation takes the passages literally, according to the meaning which they bear at first reading, understanding that the actual power to forgive sin was delegated by Christ to his apostles and their official successors. The Protestant interpretation gives a less perspicuous, figurative meaning to the words, namely, that the apostles did not receive a delegated power to forgive sin, but merely received the authority to declare that all who repented and believed in Christ were forgiven. Now there is a very wide and essential difference between the two. The Roman Catholic interpretation has the advantage of being what one would naturally understand by a first reading of the words, while the Protestant interpretation is much less clear and direct, having the appearance of being forced upon the passage in a dogmatic interest, and robbing it of the vital and explicit teaching which it seems to bear. Professor W. G. Blaikie, D.D., LL.D., discusses the problem afresh in the *Thinker* for October. He adopts the current Protestant view that it is not forgiveness and retention of sins in the absolute sense that it is intended, for (1) that prerogative is God's alone, (2) we never read of the apostles actually forgiving sin, (3) in the case of Peter versus Simon Magus (Acts 8:22) Peter puts the responsibility of forgiveness upon God. He thinks therefore that the apostles were only authorized to declare sins forgiven by God according to the provisions and conditions of the Gospel. But he adds the idea that "men were thus brought up, through the instrumentality of the apostles, so close to the Saviour that they *must* either accept or reject him. . . . The decision lay with the hearers, but the act that compelled the choice was the act of the apostles (cf. 2 Cor. 2:14-16). . . . So close was the connection of the apostles with the forgiving or retaining of sin as to justify the language used by the Lord." Well, perhaps so, and perhaps loyalty to Protestantism requires us to think so, but such an interpretation makes a very insipid and commonplace affair of statements of Jesus which seem from their plain meaning and connection to have a supreme and special import. Undoubtedly there are difficulties with taking the statements at their face value, but the current way of getting around those difficulties does not seem to deal fairly with the words of Christ as they have come down to us.

The Second Coming of Christ according to the Johannine Writings.—This is the subject of the October installment of Professor Beet's interesting series of articles which have been recently appearing in the *Expositor*. In the fourth

Gospel the great passage is 5:25-29, where "Christ puts in close juxtaposition two very different resurrections, each ushered in by his own voice, a spiritual resurrection in which those who accept the Gospel enter at once into spiritual life, and a resurrection at the last day when all the bodies of men laid in the grave will go forth, to life or to judgment, according to their works." In 6:39, 40, 44, Christ says he will "at the last day" raise those who now believe in him and who thus already have eternal life. See also 11:24; 21:22. This mention of the last day carries forward the resurrection of the just to the close of the present order of things. So far there is agreement among all the New Testament writers. But John 14:18-20; 16:16, 22, 23, 26 seem to speak of only a brief separation and a speedy return of Christ to his disciples. "These words, in their full sense, refer evidently to the gift of the Spirit promised so conspicuously in 14:16, 17; 16:13-15, immediately before the words quoted above. And they were abundantly fulfilled in the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. On that Day and in that Spirit Christ entered into a fellowship with his disciples far closer than that which they had enjoyed during his life on earth; and in this sense returned to them after the separation caused by his death. We have here an inward and spiritual coming of Christ. . . . The fulfillment of the promise before us began in Christ's appearance to his disciples on the day of his resurrection, and was completed in the gift of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. To this latter refers probably the phrase 'in that day.' The spiritual return was a real anticipation of the bodily return for which his disciples were eagerly waiting." According to the First Epistle of John (2:18) "the Christian dispensation, which in one sense is the beginning of a new and glorious era of eternal life, in another aspect is the last portion of the present order of things."

The Book of Revelation (1:7; 3:11; 22:20) teaches the visible and speedy return of the Lord. Chapter 20, which is supposed by many to teach a two-fold resurrection, is by Professor Beet interpreted in accordance with John 5:25-29. The "first resurrection," therefore, of Rev. 20:4-6, in which only the saints partake, is not a resurrection of the bodies of the saints at the beginning of the thousand years, but it is simply a reigning with Christ (*where* they will reign is not said, presumably in heaven where Christ sits at the right hand of God, not on the earth) in the spiritual resurrection life which they obtained when they became Christ's disciples, according to the teaching of the Fourth Gospel. The "second resurrection" of Rev. 20:7-15 is the universal bodily resurrection to judgment at the end of the present world age. The binding and loosing of Satan Professor Beet understands to mean that "the earlier victories of the Gospel will be followed by a removal, through an extraordinary manifestation of divine power, of the hindrances which the god of this world has been permitted to put in the way of its further progress." This will be followed by an apostasy (Rev. 20:8-10) and "Christ at his coming will find the world in deep sin, and to many who expect him not, his coming will be sudden destruction."

In the November number Professor Beet shows at length the objections to Millenarianism which arise when its interpretations of Rev. 20 are examined in comparison with the teachings of the other New Testament writings. For instance, the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:24, 25) predict a dissolution of nature at the time of Christ's return, and Revelation (6:12-17; 20:7-11) announces such a dissolution after the millenium. Christ's return cannot therefore be before the millenium, taking for granted as our author does that there can be no conflict between the views in the Synoptic Gospels and the Revelation. Again, the pre-millennial return of Christ is impossible because according to Matt. 25:31-46 the final judgment and separation of good and bad take place immediately upon his return, leaving no period of "a thousand years" between the two events. The same contemporaneousness of the resurrection and judgment of both good and bad is clear from John 5:28, 29. Paul's teaching does not admit the view of an earlier resurrection of the righteous, cf. 1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:23. Yet the two bodily comings of Christ, and the two bodily resurrections of men, first the righteous, and later the wicked, are essential elements of Millenarian doctrine. Throughout the New Testament we find no hint of these things. The only evidence which can be adduced for a pre-millennial advent of Christ is in Rev. 19:11, and for "a first resurrection" in Rev. 20:6. And these things can be well interpreted in a spiritual rather than a physical manner. "We are asked to modify and transform the abundant and various and harmonious teaching of the New Testament about the second coming of Christ in deference to an exposition of seventeen verses of the most mysterious and difficult book in the Bible. Even if this exposition were indisputable, we might fairly ask whether it is safe to throw into confusion, for such a reason, the plain teaching of the New Testament. But the exposition which is made to bear the burden of the issues so great is far from certain, or rather, is in itself improbable."

The Significance of the Living Christ for Justification, according to Paul.—

A careful study of this subject was published recently in Germany, the author being Lic. G. Schröder. His conclusion, after a consideration of current views upon the subject and a thorough investigation of the Pauline teachings, is that Paul does not base the condition of the gracious activity of God, by which he declares a sinner to be justified, on any historical work of Christ as such, especially not on any event in the history of Christ, nor on the whole course of his earthly life, but on the superhistorical Jesus Christ himself, as he has manifested himself for the salvation of man in his life, death and resurrection.

The Epistle to the Romans.—As an introduction to the study of the theology of this Epistle, Rev. A. C. Headlam, in the *Expository Times* for November, treats of the usual preliminary questions. He regards it as Paul's, and as "representing substantially the original letter as it came from the hands of the apostle," that is, he does not find the arguments conclusive against the integrity of the book. It was written from Corinth toward the end of the year

58 A. D. As to the question whether the persons to whom the Epistle was addressed were mainly Jewish or mainly Gentile Christians, he thinks the main body of the Epistle probably does not throw any light, because (1) he identifies himself with the class in the audience to whom his remarks for the moment apply, (2) the Epistle is very general in its scope, (3) in chaps. 12-14 he is not dealing with the circumstances of the Roman Church, but is laying down great moral principles which he illustrates by specific cases, (4) the letter was suggested by Paul's own experience among the churches generally, and there is nothing to show that he had any special and official knowledge of the Roman Church. What can we discover from the Acts and from the Epistle itself regarding the church at Rome? That Christianity had not been preached there officially. Paul had never worked there (Rom. 15:22-24), nor had any other leader of the apostolic body (Rom. 15:20), and when Paul arrived in that city the Jews knew little about Christianity (Acts 28:17-23). The Gospel must have come to Rome through those who, having been converted elsewhere, drifted for various reasons to Rome, which was then the great metropolis. These converts, whether of Jewish or Gentile origin, had already become separated from the synagogue, wherefore the ignorance which is referred to in the Acts passage. There was probably no fully organized church in Rome at the time Paul wrote the Epistle. With many of the persons addressed he was already acquainted through previous relations elsewhere. His summary of the matter is this: "The Epistle to the Romans does not arise out of the special needs of the community to which it was addressed; it arises out of the circumstances of the church at large, and St. Paul, impelled by various motives, writes a formal treatise on those parts of the Christian religion which were now under discussion, to a church already rapidly growing in numbers, already getting its hold on the households of some of the great families of the city, but without as yet having had the benefit of authorized and formal teaching from a member of the apostolic body. To these people he writes and, as we shall see, gives an account of what he calls "The Gospel." This, as we shall find, is not a detailed account of Christianity as a whole. St. Paul assumes a knowledge of its primary facts. He deals with it rather in as far as it is the "good news" coming to each individual, and in so far as there was doubt or discussion about it. St. Paul deals in fact with the questions of the times, but he does not deal with them in a shallow or unmeaning way. He discourses on them in relation to the broad principles of Christian life, and so he appeals to us as he appeals to them."

Sources of the Synoptic Gospels.—Dr. P. J. Gloag reaches the conclusion of his study of the Synoptic Problem in the December number of the *Thinker*. Two things seem to him to be so generally agreed upon by critics that they may be regarded as settled: (1) the priority of the canonical Gospel of Mark, or at least a document closely resembling it; with a great probability that the first and third evangelists were acquainted with and used it; (2) there was a collection or collections of the sayings of Jesus, partly oral and partly written

formed before the writing of any of the Synoptic Gospels. "It was most natural, indeed almost inevitable, that the apostles and early Christians would treasure up the sayings of Christ as of inestimable value. These sayings would often be repeated by them in their public assemblies, become indelibly fixed in their memories, and reduced to writing. . . . Different collections of the sayings of Christ would be made in different localities for the use of different churches. The more Christianity was diffused, the greater would be the number and the variety of those evangelical fragments. They would be written, some in Aramaic, for the use of the Hebrew converts in Palestine, and some in Greek, for the Hellenistic converts. It is also possible that they might have been revised by the apostles and the immediate followers of our Lord. Such collections of the sayings of Christ, both in Aramaic and in Greek, must have been used by all three evangelists in the composition of their Gospels." To the objection that no mention is made by the early Fathers of such collections, it is replied that their existence was inevitable, not that there was any single authorized document containing the sayings of Christ, but only that fragmentary writings or detached narratives were dispersed through the churches, that a careful selection of them was made by the evangelists, and that their disappearance is accounted for by their incorporation into our Gospels.

Dr. Gloag dissents from what is at present the best opinion regarding the canonical Matthew, that it is a recension in Greek by an unknown disciple from an earlier Aramaic Gospel by the apostle Matthew. He thinks we have it exactly as Matthew wrote it. He agrees, however, that it is a compilation of a number of separate documents, and that in all probability Matthew made a free use of the previously written Gospel of Mark. As to the sources of the Gospel of Mark, he admits an intimate connection between this gospel and the preaching of Peter, as attested by the Fathers, but not to the extent of supposing either that Mark wrote his Gospel according to the dictation of Peter, or that it contains a mere repetition of Peter's preaching. Mark collected notes of that preaching, and from them constructed his Gospel. But he had also another source of material in the general oral tradition of the church. Luke had for the preparation of his Gospel two sources of information (cf. Luke 1:1-4), oral tradition and written documents. He had had peculiar advantages, by his two years' companionship with Paul while the latter was imprisoned at Cæsarea, for learning from the original apostles and actual followers of Christ what was known of the deeds and sayings of their Master. He had also many written narratives, more or less fragmentary, from which he drew material. One document in particular he had which the other evangelists did not, that containing the section Luke 9:51-18:14, the so-called Peræan material. These fragments Luke would work freely into his narrative. He thinks it quite probable that Luke's Gospel is to a certain extent dependent on that of Mark, and improbable that it sustains any such relation to the Gospel of Matthew.